

Former CFO Brings World to Long-term Care Residents

BY JOSEPH SHURE



Gil Jackson

Volunteer Advocate at
Morris Hills Center in
Morristown

It's not every day that residents of Morris Hills Center get to see a man, sporting an Egyptian gown and Turkish fez, showing pictures of Athens.

But they do expect it about once a month.

That's because Gil Jackson, 72, an avid traveler and volunteer at the long-term care facility, has come up with a creative way to brighten the lives of residents here. Each month, he shows off pictures from a trip he has taken, dresses up in the area's traditional clothing and regales his elderly audience with tales of his globetrotting exploits.

The Summit resident is one of 200 participants in the Volunteer Advocate Program, overseen by the Department of the Public Advocate's Ombudsman for the Institutionalized Elderly, which investigates reports of abuse and neglect of people age 60 and older living in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.

Acting as the eyes and ears of the Ombudsman's office, volunteers spend several hours a week visiting long-term care facilities, making sure residents receive the best possible care. Since the program's inception in 1993, volunteers have donated more than 50,000 hours to advocating on behalf of the state's institutionalized elderly.

Gil's presentations is an example of one way volunteers go above and beyond the program's required minimum of spending four hours per week at a long-term care facility.

On an afternoon in July, Gil showed residents pictures of a trip he and his wife had taken to Greece and Egypt in the late 1990s.

His presentation mixed historical facts about ancient Greece and Egypt with light-hearted anecdotes, one dealing with his experience riding a stubborn camel.

"The camel takes off and I'm holding on for dear life," he said. "The camel guy, he's chasing us, calling the camel's name. This lasted for about 100 yards."



Globe Trotter

Gil Jackson shows residents pictures from his trip to Greece and Egypt

Gil has made a good impression on the residents both through his monthly shows and his weekly visits.

“I always like it,” said resident Ruth Ferares. “He’s very interesting. It’s different and very informative.”

Resident Rose Turro said that when Gil completes his normal rounds at the center, “he talks to everybody.”

“I like very much to see him,” Rose added. “I’d miss him very much if he weren’t here.”

Gil, who worked as a chief financial officer at Bell Labs before retiring, said he tries to concentrate on systemic problems when he visits Morris Hills. He knows he can spend only a limited amount of time at the 300-bed facility, so he tries to make sure staff members follow protocols meant to ensure residents receive the best care possible.

One issue Gil said he has encountered is dirty wheelchairs. Residents would sit in them while eating and residue would become lodged inside. The problem, he said, is that the wheelchairs weren’t cleaned regularly. Since he brought this to the staff’s attention, he has noticed the wheelchairs appear cleaner.

While a system exists to make sure residents’ living conditions are sanitary, monitoring that system is key, Gil explained.

“Ever since Gil began coming in here, he’s looked to see if the corners were clean and if you had any complaint, you could tell him,” said Leisel Ruf, a resident.

She once had a complaint about the food and since she told Gil things have improved. Leisel also decided to become an advocate for herself and joined the center’s dietary committee.

After Gil finished his presentation, he asked his audience which trip should be next, giving these residents some sense of control over lives that are now largely dictated by others.

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—Rose Turro
Resident of the
Morris Hills Center

“Germany!” one resident offered.

“Italy,” suggested another.

“How about India or China?” Gil countered.

“What about Ireland?” another resident proposed.

Gil assented, asking, “Can I throw some pictures of Scotland in there, too?”



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